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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1795
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5269
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8869
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000096

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2019

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SUBJECT: NLD UNCLES ON GAMBARI; NEW IDEAS FOR U.S. POLICY

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Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) During a February 10 meeting, members of the National League for Democracy's Central Executive Committee (CEC, aka "the Uncles") recounted their February 2 meetings with Aung San Suu Kyi and UN Special Representative Gambari. The Uncles said they and ASSK remain on the same page. They told Gambari that UNSYG Ban should not visit Burma without tangible results, namely the release of all political prisoners and the beginning of a time-bound dialogue. When we asked the Uncles what they would advise the USG about the way forward, they reiterated to us their rejection of the regime's constitution and the "roadmap" process. CEC members U Nyunt Wai and Win Tin suggested the USG ramp up pressure on the regime. However, in an acknowledged departure from the NLD's usual stance, fellow CEC member Khin Maung Swe said he thought it might be time to consider high-level USG dialogue with the regime, with the adjusting of sanctions on the table as possible leverage. Two days later in a conversation with Charge, Khin Maung Swe said the Uncles will shortly reconfirm publicly their willingness for unconditional dialogue with the regime, and he said they are coming around to his view that the U.S. should be engaging, too. End summary.

Meetings with ASSK, Gambari

¶2. (C) In an hour-long session with the Charge, EAP/MLS Deputy Matt Palmer, and Pol/Econ Chief, U Nyunt Wai, who had been present in the February 2 sessions with Aung San Suu Kyi and Gambari, confirmed that five CEC members selected by the SPDC had been permitted to meet alone with Aung San Suu Kyi for fifteen minutes prior to meeting together with Gambari for nearly an hour and a half. He confirmed that police refused to allow recently released CEC members Win Tin and Khin Maung Swe to attend the meetings. Nyunt Wai said that ASSK appeared healthy and is "her pretty old self." Nyunt Wai added that she looks "only 55." (Her age is 63.) Nyunt Wai viewed the private meeting between the Uncles and ASSK as a "lifting of pressure" since they had not been allowed to meet privately for over a year. They were comforted when it

was immediately clear all of them remain agreed about policy issues.

¶3. (C) According to Nyunt Wai, Gambari insisted on knowing the NLD's position on conditions for a potential UNSYG visit. ASSK and the Uncles told Gambari SYG Ban should not come unless there are "tangible results" including the release of all political prisoners and the beginning of a time-bound dialogue including democratic forces. The NLD elders also made clear to Gambari they do not accept the regime's constitution and would discourage any UN offers of technical assistance for elections as legitimizing a flawed process.

Way forward for U.S. policy?

¶4. (C) CDA and EAP/MLS Deputy Director assured the Uncles that the Burma situation will continue to be a high-priority concern of the USG under the new Administration. Asked what advice the Uncles would offer U.S. policymakers, U Nyunt Wai said pressure and more pressure via sanctions is the only course. U Win Tin said the current situation is untenable, and he also urged the USG to step up pressure on Burma in order to force what he termed "regime change." He acknowledged that he did not mean "regime change" in the sense of Iraq. Khin Maung Swe, noting that he was speaking for himself and not the party, said he would welcome a "genuine, substantive dialogue" between ASSK and Than Shwe. He said the current policy of working through the regime-appointed liaison minister Aung Kyi is not working. He suggested that the U.S. should consider high-level dialogue with the regime, using the lifting of economic sanctions as leverage. He said 20 years of sanctions have not been successful, so a new approach shou

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ld be considered.

Union Day Conversation: Shifting to Engagement?

¶5. (C) Two days later CDA and EAP/MLS Deputy Director attended a February 12 Union Day event at NLD Headquarters. On the CDA's arrival, Khin Maung Swe immediately approached to pass along that the NLD intends to issue a public statement as early as Monday to make clear it is prepared to engage in dialogue with the regime without pre-conditions. He then reiterated his comment from the earlier meeting that the USG should engage with the regime and should have sanctions on the table. When the Charge noted evidence of some disagreement among the Uncles about the USG engagement idea, Khin Maung Swe said a shift is occurring, and the NLD is likely to make that clear quite soon.

Comment

¶6. (C) We have long suspected rifts in the NLD's top leadership, and we continue to hear reports from other political activists that Khin Maung Swe and Win Tin are advocating for "change" and a more active role for the NLD among youth in particular. Still, Khin Maung Swe's suggestions about engagement were the first time a CEC member broke with the party line during an official meeting with us.

His assessment that the current approach has not worked reflects an unfortunate reality. His elaboration of the dialogue themes two days later and his articulation that a shift is occurring within the NLD are significant. The Uncles did not suggest to us that they discussed such a shift in their meeting with ASSK; however, it does seem that they are thinking seriously about how they might adjust policies to attempt to break from the current political gridlock. It appears they may see merit in the USG looking for new options, too. Whether engagement efforts from the NLD and/or the USG would gain any significant political ground from the well-entrenched Burmese regime is open to skepticism; but

Khin Maung Swe, searching for hope, seems convinced it is
worth exploring.

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